Chapter 5

On modern initiation into the spiritual

A psychological view

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Reading "My Name," a poem by Mark Strand (2005), reminded me of a similar experience I had when I was struggling with vocational questions in my early twenties. Strand lyrically captures the astonishment when, within the natural and familiar world that seems to be running along steadily on a continuous track of time and space, one receives a most personally addressed "signal of transcendence:"

> One night when the lawn was a golden green
> and the marbled moonlit trees rose like fresh memorials
> in the scented air, and the whole countryside pulsed
> with the chirr and murmur of insects, I lay in the grass
> feeling the great distances open above me, and wondered
> what I would become – and where I would find myself –
> and though I barely existed, I felt for an instant
> that the vast star-clustered sky was mine, and I heard
> my name as if for the first time, heard it the way
> one hears the wind or the rain, but faint and far off
> as though it belonged not to me but to the silence
> from which it had come and to which it would go.
>
> (Strand 2005)

In keeping with the muted spiritual tone of modernity, the speaker's intimation of immortality when his name is called, "faint and far off," is only a hint of eternity but profoundly moving nevertheless and no doubt deeply inscribed thereafter in his consciousness. What should one make of this? These lines offer a poetic rendering of a spontaneously induced initiation into the spiritual, a point of entry into individual Gnosis, which however is housed and maintained with the domain of the psychological as are all Gnostic dreams and visions. Initiation into the spiritual is one of the varieties of religious experience that today we interpret as psychological.

The key element of this initiation is the profound experience of being personally addressed by the archetypal. In the poem, the speaker's name is called

by a "voice" that emanates from the deep psyche, from the stars, nameless and timeless. What seems to be one's most personal and intimate possession – a name – is instantly transformed into something quite impersonal, belonging to the ages, not to an individual "me." It transcends the individual and transient bearer. The personal is thus lifted to the impersonal, the individual to the sublimely archetypal. Likewise, one's time-limited existence within the frame of human life becomes extended infinitely beyond all space and time. One is immortalized.

The Bible is replete with such astonishing initiations through a sudden transforming appearance of the unseen powers and the infinite[1] – Moses addressed by Yahweh at the burning but unconsumed bush on Mount Sinai; Jacob wrestling through a memorable night with the Angel of the Lord; the Holy Spirit speaking from on high as Jesus of Nazareth is baptized by John in the River Jordan. These are for us standard and traditional images of spontaneous and unscripted initiations into the spiritual. Whether this introduction into the spiritual extends beyond a single moment and results in a radical transformation of identity and vocational direction – that is, in a generalized Gnosis that gives an individual's life a whole new sense of ultimate meaning and purpose – depends on the subject's further conscious engagement with the transcendent Other, the Speaker of one's name. In the case of the modern poet, one does not know how far this revelatory moment will take him, since the poem concludes with the initiatory experience itself. The biblical figures do show dramatic change. Jacob is renamed Israel by the mysterious opponent of the night,[2] clearly a stand in for Yahweh; the timid Moses accepts his divine commission and becomes the bold leader of the Hebrew people; Jesus is divinized and enters his ministry thereafter with a mission based on identity with the Father. Such transformational engagement with the irrational process that begins and flows from this initiatory moment is surprisingly identical with the psychological process that Jung named individuation.

Initiations introduce and induce people into a new stage of life or level of consciousness, and they answer specific questions that are related to a person's identity. An initiation sponsored by and dedicated to the social world – such as a baptism, a bar mitzvah, or a wedding ceremony – answers questions about who one is with respect to one's community and what one's social location is at the present stage of life. It offers what Jung called a persona, the equivalent of what Erik Erikson (1950) named a psychosocial identity. A social identity serves as well to alleviate social anxiety by granting a defined status with respect to other people. The question that is addressed and answered by an initiation into the spiritual, on the other hand, is quite different. It tells of *why one was born*. The questions answered here are not "Who am I?" or "What is my name?" or "Where do I stand in relation to other people?" They are rather: "What is the meaning of my name from the perspective of eternity?" "What is my immortal destiny?" The answers to these

questions come from the vertex (a term much used, as I observed, and with fond reference to Wilfred Bion, by Michael Fordham) of transcendence. The social vertex is horizontal; the spiritual vertex is vertical and cuts through linear time at every (or any) moment. Initiation into the spiritual happens in the event that Chronos (linear time) meets eternity and produces what Paul Tillich (1963), following the Greek tradition, named *Kairos* (an opening in time that is pregnant with potential meaning). The result of receiving an initiation in the spiritual vertex is "Gnosis," a type of knowledge that both intimates why one was born into this life, as regarded from the perspective of the archetypal, and offers a transcendent identity to match this knowledge. In this initiation, one's name is both called and changed in significance. Such Gnosis directs one to a sense of identity and meaning that is grounded in the archetypal, in eternity. This is not rational knowledge. It is noetic (from the Greek *nous*), by which I mean that it is derived from what Aristotle called "something within . . . that is divine" and that therefore partakes of eternity.[3] This is the perspective, or vertex, of the Self (in Jung's terminology), not of the ego. Initiation into the spiritual unites the time-bound and the timeless, the ego and the Self, and by this conjunction may serve to put existential anxiety to rest.

The question is: does this make sense in a modern cultural context? Throughout the recent period in western cultural history that goes by the name of modernity, people have speculated that humans were possibly growing beyond the need for the spiritual, and most certainly beyond their childish dependence on traditional religion. As the scientific worldview takes hold more firmly in culture at large, it has been thought, the importance of religious faith will fade and then disappear altogether along with all other superstitious beliefs that claim to explain the nature and purpose of the universe. Science will eventually explain concretely and materially what religions have sought to account for with their mythologies and theologies. What Aristotle referred to as "something within . . . that is divine" will be discovered in a set of neurons that can be measured and photographed. Scientific logic will ease myth out of the picture altogether.

Following upon the provocative line of thought put forward by Francis Fukuyama (1992) in *The End of History and the Last Man*, the German Jungian analyst, Wolfgang Giegerich (2004) has applied to psychology a similar version of the Hegelian dialectic at work in cultural evolution in his article, "The End of Meaning and the Birth of Man." Modernity spells the end of meaning, according to Giegerich. He claims that modernity has created an irreversible type or level of consciousness that no longer depends on or needs collective or personal myth. This new consciousness does not orient itself toward or by transcendent Being, but only by practical or instrumental notions derived from its own internal logic. In keeping with this historical development, psychology and the other social sciences have by now effectively interpreted and rationally understood all myth and theology, and thus

they have emptied them of their symbolic value. They have "sublimated" them (i.e., transformed and replaced their contents with conscious knowledge). The Age of Meaning, in the sense that meaning traditionally grew out of myth and assumed a transcendent location from which human meaning was derived, is therefore now permanently and irrevocably behind us; logically driven, the Age of Man has now arrived. Naturally nostalgia for the good old days when meaning meant something remains, and one can find vestiges of this in even the most dedicated modern men and women from time to time, in a lapsed moment of emotional back-sliding or in efforts to resurrect such meaning through mythopoetic interpretation. Jung building his tower in Bollingen and retreating there to meditate on the immortal images of the collective unconscious is an example of this, in Giegerich's view. As a further consequence, because there is no longer a genuine need for myth or transcendent meaning, there is now also no legitimate cultural space for spiritual initiations. Initiation into the spiritual is nowadays anachronistic, even though it continues to take place in some culturally regressive ways. For those who have advanced to the state of modern consciousness, it is a mere relic of outmoded, pre-modern attitudes, or worse still, a lie, a fake, play-acting.

This is a powerful and sobering argument. Does this mean, then, that the archetypal psyche has also been sublimated into reason and that one is left only with the historical memory of what has been but is no more? This would seem to be Giegerich's point. Free of myth, the modern person is free to enjoy and play with the stories and images of antiquity, as told in what were once considered sacred texts. We are left with memory. I think it is also the point that produced Jung's personal crisis in 1913, which he surmounted by going modernity one better. I hope this will become evident in what follows. Not only Jung but also sociologists like Peter Berger and theologians like Harvey Cox have registered that in modernity both the question of transcendent meaning and various offers to answer it continue to appear, but these come from surprising sources (like the "secular city"), not from the traditional religions and symbol systems. These modern and postmodern sources do not announce themselves explicitly as symbolic. The archetypal returns, therefore, in new and hard to decipher symbols. Jung (1959) speculated, for instance, that the appearance of flying saucers in modern times was the signal of a new myth in the making and therefore as well of an emergent and modern expression of transcendence, albeit presented on a concrete material level.

Initiation into the spiritual continues, moreover, in earnest at the psychological level despite the inhibitions imposed by modernity. The difference is that this is not equated with the supernatural. It is taken up by the modern person and interpreted to mean something about psychological development, individuation, and a movement toward greater consciousness. In this shift, the supernatural has been sublimated by modern thought into the psychological. Gnosis becomes a psychological state of inner conviction and insight without depending upon the supernatural to offer warrants of authenticity.

The spontaneous arrival of Gnosis is not taken to be absolute knowledge about the nature of reality; it is self knowledge, a sense of conviction, a new identity. Nor is it necessarily coincident with an obvious state of need or discomfort that calls out desperately for an answer to the question of life's ultimate meaning. Without conscious need or provocation, the psyche may offer Gnosis spontaneously. In this instance, it answers a question that as psychological moderns we suspect may well have a place in the psyche but remains unconscious. Giegerich's account of modern persons may be correct when he claims that they do not experience the need to ask the meaning question, and whatever existential angst they might register in consciousness at the realization of being without a myth of meaning is easily and quickly dispelled by a dose of entertainment or pills. Even so, they may be taken by surprise and experience transcendence, as in Mark Strand's poem, receiving thereby a spontaneous initiation into the spiritual. *Vocatus atque non vocatus deus aderit* ("Invoked or not invoked, God will be present"),[4] as the Delphic oracle announced to the Lacedaemonians who were about to go to war against Athens. This motto, still relevant, should not be taken as a signal of pre-modern superstition or kow-towing to a supernatural presence. It means quite plainly that one is never out of reach of intervention by unconscious archetypal forces, for good or ill.[5]

One of the chief discoveries of depth psychology – itself a product of modernity[6] – was that there are archetypal processes (as well as archetypal images and ideas) in play in the psyche that manifest whenever and wherever they will, spontaneously, unwilled, and unsolicited by the ego. Jung (1938/1954: par. 153) writes with cautious scientific modesty:

> If I have any share in these discoveries, it consists in my having shown that archetypes are not disseminated only by tradition, language, and migration, but that they can rearise spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without any outside influence.

In fact, he demonstrated at length and in detail the archetypal process that leads to "spiritual development" (Jung 1944: v) in the modern person. This he named the individuation process. In extensive commentaries on the dreams and visions of several notable people in analysis with himself and others,[7] he lays this development out in graphic detail, step by step. These case histories, moreover, contain numerous initiations into the territory covered by the term "spiritual," though without reference to anything supernatural. The point here is that these people were "modern" by any standard, and yet they received psychological Gnosis in great depth and abundance. In Jung's view, the "reality of the psyche" does not become subsumed under or sublimated by the attitudes and postures of collective consciousness, be they modern or otherwise conditioned. It remains free to offer its astonishing revelations even within this cultural context. For the people whose individuation processes

were discussed by Jung, analysis provided the occasion for an initiation into the spiritual and became the setting in which they extended and deepened this initiation into a full spiritual development.

Whether interpreted psychologically or metaphysically, the process that unfolds in the individuation opus shows a progression of levels or stages, not necessarily linear but rather increasingly sharp and definite. The surprising and spontaneous initiation into a further stage of Gnosis and into an identity that matches it came to a "modern woman" who awoke one morning and found herself in possession of the following memory of a dream:

> I am walking along a long covered walkway that is very "architectural" with high ceilings, tall pillars on my left, and unmarked doors in the wall to my right. It is a monumental space and made entirely of gray stone. There is no one else in sight. The doors are shut and show no indication of what lies beyond. I am looking for the psychology Institute. This space has an otherworldly feeling to it.
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> I see an open door and walk into a room. People of many nationalities are inside. Some are Chinese. A man dressed in white, who looks like someone I know, says in a matter-of-fact voice: "You are here to find out why you were born." He points to a bed that I am to lie down on and places a clear gel over the surface. I lie down on it and am covered with a blanket. He turns my head slightly to the right and a fluid flows out of my ear. I ask about this, and he says it is the cause of my arthritis.
>
> Later we go into a second room, and I sit in a chair.
>
> Later still, I am standing in yet another room and people, all of them dressed in white, form a line and stand before me, one by one. I am to look deeply into their eyes and determine where their consciousness lies and who they think they are, then to look deeper and deeper until I see their soul. My job is to connect people to their soul. There is only a brief eye contact, and then they go on. The job is done like this. Now I understand why I have been born – it is to do this work of connecting people to their soul.

Of this dream, which (as dreams typically do) simply arrived unsought and unasked for, one can observe that it follows the classic form of initiations.[8] There is first a sense of being removed from ordinary social life and entering into a *temenos*: the monumental architecture implies such a sacred and protected space. This sets the stage for a transformational ritual, including a healing ceremony,[9] followed by an extension of liminality while the subject sits and waits in an intermediate room. This middle stage is followed by a return to society with a new identity and consciousness of mission. At the time of the dream, this woman was living in retirement after a long career as a psychotherapist. It is therefore clear that this dream does not represent an initiation into a social/professional identity, a persona, but rather into the

spiritual, which speaks about the deeper meaning of her life's work, a vocation that is not tied to a specific job or profession. At the time of the dream, she was not asking for meaning; meaning simply arrived. As a modern person, she has no affiliation with organized religion, does not believe in Creedal statements about the Divine or the supernatural, and was not in any sort of existential crisis requiring an "answer" of ultimate meaning. Existential anxiety, if such there was, in this case was entirely unconscious to her. She could have said she was done with meaning, but evidently, pace Giegerich, meaning was not done with her.

Initiation into the spiritual typically announces itself in the psyche of modern people spontaneously and without conscious request or intentional preparation for it. It comes because it has to happen, and it appears in a psychological form. Sometimes it is so shocking and anxiety provoking that it leads to a request for psychotherapeutic treatment. The all too familiar and by now cliché ridden midlife crisis in modern societies, which can and often does initiate a person into a period of profound psychological transformation, is an example.[10] This can nevertheless offer the opportunity for an initiation into the spiritual if taken up as such. One needs to recognize that this initiation into the spiritual is based on archetypal processes and runs from archetypal energies beyond the grasp of ego consciousness, and therefore it does not require social intent or engineering. It need not be explicit and public. In modernity, in fact, it is typically unofficial, undesired, and seemingly pathological. It often comes in the guise of private suffering, such as unaccountable or stubborn depressions, and the process following is played out in the analyst's office. Joseph Henderson (2005) documents several instances of this in his classic study, *Thresholds of Initiation*.

One should distinguish therefore between two types of initiation: the deliberate and the spontaneous. The deliberate type is undertaken intentionally and is organized along traditional lines by a recognized social or religious institution, and it shows an explicit purpose to transform identity and consciousness in a specific way. Examples of this type of initiation are found in the literature of anthropologists (Arnold van Gennep's (1960) *The Rites of Passage* being a familiar text of such a type, depicting adolescent initiation among the Australian aborigines) and in the history of religions (the works of Mircea Eliade are replete with such). Jung was fond of Franz Cumont's extensive studies of Mithraism, which describe a religion of the early centuries of the common era that seems to have worked with seven degrees of initiation: "The mystic (*sacratus*) successively assumed the names of Raven (*corax*), Occult (*cryphius*), Soldier (*miles*), Lion (*leo*), Persian (*Perses*), Runner of the Sun (*heliodromus*), and Father (*pater*)" (Cumont 1903/1956: 152). These grades were achieved through ritual initiations that may have involved ordeals severe enough to threaten the life of the initiant and perhaps involved, at the beginning and primitively, instances of human sacrifice carried out in the caves where the earliest initiations, carried out by the pirates of Cilicia

according to Plutarch (see Ulansey 1989: 40), were conducted. These initiation rituals were presided over by a special group of members who functioned as priests and ritual elders, themselves most likely drawn from the highest rank of initiates, the "Fathers." Cumont surmised that the animal figures, like Raven and Lion, could be traced back to prehistoric times when divinities appeared, or were represented, as animals (theriomorphic forms of the Gods), and so by identifying with these animal images the Mithraists took on the identity of the Gods. They thus became "deified" through the initiation rituals. Masks would have been worn to strengthen this conviction and identity. Through this deification process, the human individual was elevated, stage-by-stage, to a spiritual level of identity with a Deity. The human and the divine become somehow intermingled in this type of religious initiation. In alchemy an operation with similar outcome was called *solificatio*, a term much commented upon by Jung.

Jung's own initiation into the spiritual, while bearing a distinct relation to the Mithraic mysteries,[11] was spontaneous, however, and it is instructive. As a modern man, Jung did not seek out an explicit initiation into the spiritual. While officially a Swiss Protestant and baptized and confirmed as such, this affiliation held only cultural (i.e., persona-limited) significance for him. A medical doctor trained in psychiatry and an early Freudian psychoanalyst, he was a student of religious experience and sought to interpret and explain it through the use of psychological and psychoanalytical concepts. He did not join a religious cult, nor did he seek to found one. As a person holding thoroughly modern attitudes and identified closely with his scientific career as a psychological researcher, he did not believe in the teachings or the theological assertions of his own or any other religious tradition. He was not a man of faith, clearly. He wanted instead, as he said many times, to know and understand.

Jung confesses that at one point in his life, however, while in his late thirties and just after finishing a massive study (titled *Symbole und Wandlungen der Libido*) on the mythological background of the psychological images found in the case of a young American woman, Miss Frank Miller, he felt acutely and painfully the absence of myth in his personal life.[12] What does this mean? Is it a lapse from the modern to a pre-modern sensibility? I would suggest that it is simply human and can occur to anyone in any historical or cultural context. This came, however, at a complex moment in Jung's young life, and a critical one. He was just at midlife (thirty-seven years old), and a crisis was brewing.

In *Symbole* (rendered into a rather questionable English translation by Beatrice Hinkle as *Psychology of the Unconscious*), Jung had employed a multitude of religious and mythological resources, including the use of Cumont's books on Mithraism,[13] to interpret Miss Miller's fantasies and visions. While working at a feverish pitch, Jung also realized with increasing clarity that he was in the midst of a radical departure from the views and

teachings of his friend and mentor at the time, Sigmund Freud. With the publication of this work and Freud's dismissive misreading of it,[14] the tension between the two men rose to a climax, and they broke off relations in bitter acrimony. This took place in December 1912 and coincided with Jung's own questioning of himself about his personal myth and his entry into an extended midlife crisis. The conclusion of his work on *Symbole* and the decisive break with Freud as 1912 turned into 1913 catapulted Jung into a period of introspection and emotional upheaval, with dire threats, as he says, to his mental health and sanity. Reaching this extremity set the stage for his initiation into the spiritual. Powerful symbolic dreams ensued as well as a breakthrough into what he would later speak of as the practice of active imagination.

The key moment of his initiation into the spiritual occurred, in my opinion, through an active imagination carried out in December 1913. This is by no means to say that Jung did not have many significant experiences of the numinous before this, including some in his childhood,[15] but the process launched by this dramatic vision in 1913 resulted in a permanent and lifelong change in Jung's spiritual understanding and affected fundamentally, I believe, his sense of identity. It led directly into a transformational process, which created his mature consciousness of mission and meaning. It was nothing less than a dramatic initiation into the spiritual.

Jung calls this visionary experience a deification mystery.[16] It occurred in his second session of active imagination. The first session, which took place the day before, set the stage. In the initial one, he came upon a strange couple in a cave and was surprised when they named themselves Salome and Elijah. A black snake accompanied them. Salome was young and beautiful, but blind; Elijah was an old man, a wisdom figure. Elijah began teaching him about the objectivity of the psyche. In the second and, I think the critical, session, Jung decided to return to visit these figures again and learn more about them. Here he found himself in a different landscape – "the bottom of the world:"

> Then a most disagreeable thing happened. Salome became very interested in me, and she assumed that I could cure her blindness. She began to worship me. I said, "Why do you worship me?" She replied, "You are Christ." In spite of my objections she maintained this. I said, "This is madness," and became filled with skeptical resistance. Then I saw the snake approach me. She came close and began to encircle me and press me in her coils. The coils reached up to my heart. I realized as I struggled, that I had assumed the attitude of the Crucifixion. In the agony and the struggle, I sweated so profusely that the water flowed down on all sides of me. Then Salome rose, and she could see. While the snake was pressing me, I felt that my face had taken on the face of an animal of prey, a lion or a tiger.
>
> (McGuire 1989: 96)

This imaged transformation was decisive. It was a deification mystery,[17] in which Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist and father of five children with a big house on the lake and a multitude of social and professional responsibilities that came with this persona and social position, was changed beyond recognition. In the image, he assumed the form and identity of Aion, an immortal being who ruled over time by holding control over the precession of the equinoxes.[18] Jung was familiar with this image of deity from his recent studies in Mithraism. Cumont's books contain several graphic pictures of precisely this image.[19] In his seminar account of this active imagination, Jung interprets it as follows: "In this deification mystery you make yourself into the vessel, and are a vessel of creation in which the opposites reconcile. The more these images are realized, the more you will be gripped by them." (McGuire 1989: 99). For him, this was clearly an initiation into an irrational process that would carry him ever more deeply into experiences of the archetypal psyche, a domain of experience where time and eternity phenomenologically are joined.

One of the prime dilemmas for the modern person who spontaneously undergoes initiatory experiences of this sort is their aura of weirdness. This is not exactly what one runs into at the shopping mall or in an airport. Since they are not contained and administered by a living tradition that oversees the initiation rites into these states of consciousness, these experiences appear bizarre and threatening. Without a traditional context overseen by ritual elders, Jung notes, one "is assailed by the fear that perhaps this is madness. This is how madness begins" (McGuire 1989: 97). Jung was a practicing psychiatrist with extensive exposure to people with severe mental disorders, and so he registered significant doubt and anxiety about what was happening to him: "You can be gripped by these ideas so that you really go mad, or nearly so. These images have so much reality that they recommend themselves, and such extraordinary meaning that one is caught." Immediately he also adds: "Awe surrounds the mysteries, particularly the mystery of deification. This was one of the most important of the mysteries; it gave the immortal value to the individual – it gave the certainty of immortality." But then following that testimonial, again we hear the caution of the clinical psychiatrist:

> Anybody could be caught by these things and lost in them – some throw the experience away saying it is all nonsense, and thereby losing their best value, for these are the creative images. Another may identify himself with the images and become a crank or a fool.
>
> (McGuire 1989: 99)

This accurately describes the modern person's anxiety about spiritual experience: It may be tantamount, or initiatory, to madness! And so it was for Jung, himself a modern man to the core. And yet he tipped in favor of letting the

experience speak to him and, more courageously still, sharing it with the public in his Seminar.

In a spontaneous address given some fourteen years later at the Eranos Tagung of 1939, and afterwards written up under the title "Concerning Rebirth," Jung(1968) once more took up the theme of initiation into the spiritual by interpreting Sutra 18 from the Koran ("The Cave"). This was a text he had used in conjunction with the Mithraic materials already some twenty-seven years earlier in *Wandlungen*. The Sutra opens with a reference to "the sleepers," a group of seven men who entered a cave and remained there for several hundred years, losing track of time (i.e., entering into a state of timelessness) and becoming thereby "immortals." About this Jung comments as follows:

> Anyone who gets into that cave, that is to say into the cave which everyone has in himself, or into the darkness that lies behind consciousness, will find himself involved in an – at first – unconscious process of transformation. By penetrating into the unconscious he makes a connection with his unconscious contents. This may result in a momentous change of personality in the positive or negative sense. The transformation is often interpreted as a prolongation of the natural span of life or as an earnest of immortality.
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> (Jung 1968: par. 241)

This is resonant with Jung's experience following his first active imagination, also an experience of entering a cave and finding himself among the "Immortals," Elijah and Salome.[20] Subsequent to the image of the sleepers in the cave, the Sutra presents the account of Moses' encounter and journey with an angel of God (recognized as Khidr, "the Verdant One," in Islamic mystical tradition), a figure who Jung says "symbolizes not only the higher wisdom but also a way of acting which is in accord with this wisdom and transcends reason" (Jung 1968: par. 247). This sequence of events is in line with Jung's own inner process following the dramatic initiation into the spiritual that came about during his first active imaginations. Thereafter he began a long conversation (call it a symbolic journey) with the figure found in the cave, Elijah, who transformed later into the figure Philemon and eventually into yet another form named Ka.[21] That lasted for decades, and in the course of this encounter he discovered and explored the domain that he would refer to as the reality of the objective psyche. The Elijah-Philemon-Ka figure (Jung's Khidr) taught him, he says, psychic objectivity, and the process of active imagination introduced him to "the matrix of the mythopoetic imagination which has vanished from our rational age" (Jung 1989: 183 and 188).

In summary, it was ironically enough the transformation process that Jung studied with a skeptical analytic attitude and wrote about in *Wandlungen* that laid the foundations for his own experience of spontaneous initiation into the

spiritual. In *Wandlungen*, he predicted that Frank Miller was about to undergo a schizophrenic crisis. His own crisis, which was triggered by the completion of his book and his break with Freud, picked up similar disquieting themes but resulted in a totally different, and ultimately meaningful, kind of initiation. This was due to his accepting the risk of allowing a frightening spontaneous initiation experience happen to him. Writing in German, of course, he advocated "*geschehen lassen*," ("letting it happen") as the key to entering into this process. This is a telling instance within the context of modernity with its characteristic scientific, secular consciousness, where intellectual study and interpretation of traditional sacred texts at a specific and *kairic* moment in a person's life lead to an individual and spontaneous initiation into the spiritual, which in turn transformed identity and consciousness going forward entirely and irrevocably just as traditional initiations are meant to do. One should not conclude that the study of these texts caused the initiatory moment; rather, it provided some of the images and structures used by the autonomous unconscious to carry out its archetypal process of initiation into the spiritual.

Another example of a spontaneous initiation into the spiritual on the part of a "modern man," which also occurred during a period of intensive study of traditional texts and following the rupture of an important mentor relationship, can be adduced in the case of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber.[22] The relevant period in Buber's life fell between 1903, when he retired from public life for a period of deep incubation and study after making a decisive break with the then leader of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, and 1909, the year of his re-emergence when he came forward "with a stature and dignity that made men only ten years his junior look up to him as a leader and a sage" (Friedman 1991: 55). Buber was 25 years old in 1903 when he "retired," and he was 31 when he re-emerged and lectured in Vienna with such persuasive charisma on the topic, "Judaism and Mankind." What filled and occupied these six years was, importantly, an immersion in Hasidic texts, which culminated in the publication of a book that brought him his first fame as a writer, *Die Legende des Baalshem*, a retelling of Hasidic tales in contemporary language and style. Buber's authoritative biographer, Maurice Friedman, declares: "Buber's encounter with Hasidism can be described only as a breakthrough or a conversion" (Friedman 1991: 39). From this period of study and reflection, Buber's inner life and sense of identity was most significantly affected, however, by the discovery of meaning of the spiritual leader and guiding figure in Hasidic religiosity, the *zaddik*. For Buber, the *zaddik* became a living symbol and one that anchored his identity and provided the essential direction for his vocation as a teacher and writer.

Similar to Jung's break with Freud had been Buber's break with Herzl. Herzl was a charismatic father figure for the young Martin Buber, who until meeting him and being drawn into the inner circle of Zionists around him had been a typical, albeit gifted and promising university student of European

philosophy. His early heroes were Kant and Nietzsche. As a student, Buber was blessed with a sharp intellect and a rare gift for languages, as well as a rhetorical flair that astonished many who heard him speak. Reading Herzl on Zionism and then meeting him, however, had the decisive effect of pulling Buber back toward his roots in Jewish culture. These had been firmly established through his close relationship to his paternal grandfather, the extraordinary Solomon Buber, who was a leading citizen and businessman in Lvov, Ukraine, and a great Talmudic scholar and the authoritative editor of the critical editions of the Midrash. (Friedman 1991: 8ff.). Solomon also introduced his young grandson to the Hasidim of Belz and Zans, nearby villages that they would visit from time to time in order to observe this remarkable form of ardent Jewish religiosity. His later years of intensive philosophical study, and the cosmopolitan university life in Vienna and Leipzig, served to separate Martin from this traditional background, so that by the time he came into contact with Zionism and Herzl, its charismatic leader, he had gained considerable distance from religious Judaism. Zionism offered Buber a modern path back to his roots in Judaism. It also provided a brilliant opportunity for him to stretch his wings as a thinker and speaker, finding in this movement "a channel into which he could concentrate his energies, like his grandfather, and give himself to fruitful and unremitting work" (Friedman 1991: 25).

Buber soon began writing about Zionism as an aspect of a broader "Jewish Renaissance" that would free European Jewry from the fetters of "*ghetto* psychology" and unleash its latent potential for creativity. In time this became a carefully conceived program within the Zionist movement, and Buber took the lead in pressing a cultural and spiritual agenda forward in Zionist circles, publications, and conferences. Herzl's vision for Zionism, however, was radically and purely political and had nothing whatever to do with the values that were now central to Buber's vision. For Buber, Zion was a symbol; for Herzl, it was geography. The young Buber was a brilliant philosopher and religious thinker; the elder Herzl was an equally brilliant politician. Both were gifted orators and presented a charismatic figure on stage. On the difference between their versions of Zionism, however, hung their increasingly confrontational dispute. This began in 1901 and lasted until their decisive break in 1903, when Herzl accused Buber of having left the movement and suggested that he needed to find his way back. To this Buber took violent exception and refused to accept Herzl's judgment. The final parting of the ways, which took place during the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, was for Buber a trauma on the order of Jung's when he broke off relations with Freud. "The shattering that I experienced is perhaps the greatest of my life," he wrote to his wife, Paula. (quoted by Friedman 1991: 35). To this Friedman adds, lifting Buber's own words from his autobiographical account, *Meetings*: "For the twenty-five-year-old Buber, this was one of the first times in which he set foot on the soil of tragedy, where all question of being in the right disappeared" (Friedman 1991: 35).

This shattering conclusion of his relationship with Herzl led shortly thereafter to Buber's withdrawal from public life, which lasted for six years. It was during this period that he discovered the texts of Hasidism and immersed himself in its stories and spirituality. In many ways this represented on one level a return to childhood. It brought him back to the Hebrew language, which he had studied with his grandfather, and to the images he remembered from their visits to the Hasidic communities around Lvov. Most importantly, he discovered a little book, *The Testament of Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem*, which introduced him to the figure Israel ben Eliezer, the great *zaddik* and founder of Hasidism. Buber writes of this discovery in a way that shows its profound impact:

> It was then that, overpowered in an instant, I experienced the Hasidic soul. The primally Jewish opened to me, flowering to newly conscious expression in the darkness of exile: man's being created in the image of God I grasped as deed, as becoming, as task. And this primally Jewish reality was a primal human reality, the content of human religiousness. . . . The image out of my childhood, the memory of the zaddik and his community, rose upward and illuminated me: I recognized the idea of the perfected man. At the same time I became aware of the summons to proclaim it to the world.
>
> (quoted by Friedman 1991: 39–40)

In his little book, *Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments*, Buber (2002) writes further of the *zaddik* as "the perfected man in whom the immortal finds its mortal fulfillment" (Buber 2002: 45). What he says in these passages about the *zaddik* corresponds with remarkable precision to Jung's description of the *anthropos*, the archetypal image of the completed human, the individuated personality. Buber's deep encounter with the sayings and stories by and about the Baal-Shem, and the struggles he (with the help of his literarily gifted wife, Paula) endured in order to transform the fragments of narrative into the book that brought him his first fame, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, led him to a fundamental realization about his own identity: "I bear in me the blood and the spirit of those who created it, and out of my blood and spirit it has become new" (quoted by Friedman 1991: 41). He wrote these words in the introduction to the first edition in 1907. Unlike Jung, Buber did not leave an account of his dreams and fantasies from this period, but from his words we can safely conclude that his meeting with the *zaddik* was a great deal more significant than a literary exercise. It was an encounter, and one that transformed his consciousness and gave him a new vision of his vocation. It constituted an initiation into the spiritual, which answered for him the question of his life's meaning and direction. He emerged from this initiation a new man with a new mission, grounded in an experience of the transcendent. The *zaddik* is an "Immortal," in the symbolic sense, which is how Buber grasped this reality.

Did Buber become identified with an archetypal image, the *zaddik*? No more than Jung became identified with Aion or with Philemon, the wisdom figure of his active imagination. For both of these modern men, the image of an "Immortal" and the experience of wholeness and meaning conferred by this intimate association remained an aspect of their identities, an available inner resource and guiding spirit, but at a clear distance from the ego. Buber writes of his relation to the image of the *zaddik* as follows:

> I who am truly no *zaddik*, no one assured in God, rather a man endangered before God, a man wrestling ever anew for God's light, ever anew engulfed in God's abysses, nonetheless, when asked a trivial question and replying with a trivial answer, then experienced from within for the first time the true *zaddik*, questioned about revelations and replying in revelations. I experienced him in the fundamental relation of his soul to the world: in his responsibility.
>
> (Buber 2002: 49)

At moments of encounter – or to use his later phrase, in I–Thou relationships – the *zaddik* would emerge in Buber and influence his consciousness, bending his identity in the direction of the teacher, the sage, the one who could speak "in revelations" and with full responsibility. This initiation into the spiritual, in which he met up with the symbol of the *zaddik*, became a resident fixture in Buber's consciousness, orienting him in his life's work and giving him a firm and abiding sense of meaning.

In summary, I should say that by using these two examples of famously modern men who experienced a spontaneous initiation into the spiritual, I do not intend to create the impression that this is limited to such exceptional individuals. On the contrary, I hope to convey the notion that this is a possibility for contemporary people, even if they are consciously modern and dedicated to science or post-Kantian philosophy and not left over benighted traditionalists. What a positive outcome of this initiation mainly depends on is an inner openness to the "call." This readiness to receive the transcendent Other creatively may well increase amidst painful experiences of rupture and loss of significant others – teachers, mentors, parents or parent figures – as we have seen in Jung and Buber. The crisis that ensues from such loss may open the way for the key transformation in a person's life, which sets the course for the years and decades to come.

Notes

1 See Kugel (2003) for a multitude of examples with extensive discussion of this phenomenon.
2 According to *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*: "Jacob's new name signified a new self: no longer was he the Supplanter but *Israel*, which probably means 'God

rules.' This name, which later designated the tribal confederacy, is interpreted to mean 'The one who strives with God' " (Metzger and Murphy 1991: 43).

3 Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, X.vii.8.

4 As is well known, Jung had this Delphic utterance, which he found quoted in a book by Erasmus (*Epitome*, 1563), carved in stone above the door of his home on the Seestrasse in Küsnacht. It has become a part of Jungian lore.

5 When asked in a BBC radio broadcast by Stephen Black what this motto above his door meant for him, Jung replied: "I wanted to express the fact that I always feel unsafe, as if I'm in the presence of superior possibilities" (Bennet 1962: 147).

6 See Homans (1995) for an incisive discussion of the relation between modernity and the rise of psychology, specifically psychoanalysis and analytical psychology.

7 I am referring specifically to Christiana Morgan, co-creator with Henry Murray of the Thematic Apperception Test (see Jung's psychological commentary on her active imagination published in Jung (1998) *Visions: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1930–1934*), Kristine Mann, an analyst and founding member of the Jung Institute in New York (see Jung's (1934) essay "A Study in the Process of Individuation") and Nobel Prize winner in physics, Wolfgang Pauli (see Part 2 of Jung's (1944) *Psychology and Alchemy*).

8 This was described and defined by Arnold van Gennep (1960) in his classic work, *The Rites of Passage*: the three stages of initiation involve rites of separation, transition, and incorporation or reintegration. They typically feature death and rebirth imagery.

9 I can add that the dreamer was in fact suffering from a mild form of arthritis in her hands at the time. Subsequent to the dream, the arthritis cleared up and disappeared.

10 I have discussed the midlife transition at length in two books: *In MidLife* (Stein 1983) and *Transformation: Emergence of the Self* (Stein 1998b).

11 See Noll (1999) for a rundown of these similarities. Noll, in this article, wants to make the point, however, that Jung was so deeply influenced by his studies of mystery religions, especially Mithraism, that his whole psychology was imbued with it to the point of constituting its major content. My view is that these early studies prepared the psychological ground for his initiation into the spiritual but were not causally related otherwise to this initiatory experience, and that their specific content – the *Leontocephalus* image, for instance – faded into the background as further experiences in active imagination unfolded. It was the process, not the specific content of the visionary experiences, which were important in Jung's spiritual development. In time, many traditions came together in his inner life, including importantly Taoism, Islam, the Upanishads, Buddhism, Christianity, Gnosticism, and alchemy. I think it is a mistake to privilege one of them – Mithraism – over the others. Jung's inner life was religiously eclectic, to say the least! His psychological theory, moreover, rests on a different level, which I have outlined in my book, *Jung's Map of the Soul* (Stein 1998a). There were many influences from numerous cultural sources on Jung and his theory-making (see, for instance, Stein 2005).

12 Jung gives a detailed report of this in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung 1989: 171ff.).

13 The two works cited in *Symbole* are F.V.M. Cumont (1896–1899) *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, and Cumont (1903) *The Mysteries of Mithra*, trans. T.J. McCormack.

14 See Jung's letter to Freud of 3 December 1912, *The Freud/Jung Letters* (Freud and Jung 1974: 525), where he interprets Freud's underestimation of his work as a derivative of his anxiety neurosis, which on two occasions caused him to faint in Jung's presence.

15 Several of these are mentioned in the early chapters of Jung's (1989) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.
16 I am following here the account recorded in McGuire (1989) *Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925*, pp. 95ff. This seminar, given in English, took place in the year of Jung's fiftieth birthday. A group of twenty-seven students of analytical psychology, mostly American and English, attended, and the notes from the seminar, privately taken, were later circulated in mimeographed form, though never checked and approved for publication by Jung. This same practice held true for the other seminars Jung gave, for which similarly mimeographed versions of his words were made available to students and later to the libraries of training institutes. Contrary to Richard Noll's (1999) sinister speculations, put forward in his "Jung the *Leontocephalus*" paper, about secretive cultic practices in Jungian circles with respect to the notes from these seminars, there was nothing especially hidden or secret about the mimeographed seminar notes. The fact was simply that sales were restricted because the notes had not been checked and approved by the author.
17 Jung's phrase. See McGuire (1989: 97ff.) for a detailed account of how Jung understood this.
18 See Ulansey (1989) for an extensive argument about the astrological features of Mithraism, about which Jung probably had some knowledge.
19 See, for instance, Cumont's *The Mysteries of Mithra*, p. 105, where there is a picture of the Mithraic Kronos (Aeon or Zervan Akarana), about which Cumont says: "The statue here reproduced was found in the mithraeum of Ostia. . . . This leontocephalous figure is entirely nude, the body being entwined six times by a serpent, the head of which rests on the skull of the god."
20 Following Richard Noll's (1999) logic, this direct reference to the Koran in Jung's first active imagination would indicate that he became Islamic thereby!
21 The story of this extended dialogue is told in Jung (1989: Chapter 6), "Confrontation with the Unconscious".
22 Maurice Friedman has reconstructed Buber's life with great care and in meticulous detail in three volumes, *Martin Buber's Life and Work*, which he condensed masterfully in the single volume biography, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: A Life of Martin Buber* (1991). I am following Friedman's *Encounter* in this work.

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